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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: April 14, 1959

SUBJECT: German Political Developments

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Erich Stratling  
First Secretary  
German Embassy

Mr. Edwin M. J. Kretzmann

COPIES TO: G - Mr. Murphy  
P - Mr. Berding  
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P - Mr. Kretzmann (4)

(13)

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I had not seen Mr. Stratling for some weeks during which time he had been in Germany on a special mission which involved renewing some of his contacts with the German parliamentarians. He had returned to this country just at the time of the NATO meeting and we had been unable to get together until my return from Colorado and Kentucky.

Mr. Stratling said that he had been sent to Germany to find out whether certain proposals which Ambassador Grewe had made to the German Foreign Office were being favorably received since they had had no indication of the reception. Ambassador Grewe had made his recommendations to the Foreign Office after the working group meetings in Paris and had suggested certain minor modifications in the American plan. Mr. Stratling was also instructed to contact some of the parliamentarians on the same matter. While he was there, Ambassador Grewe was also summoned home to the Foreign Office. Mr. Stratling claimed that the German Foreign Office was completely demoralized. For some time there have been hints that von Brentano was slated for replacement because of ill health, excessive drinking and smoking and general incompetence. In the light of Adenauer's decision to run for the presidency, Stratling thought Brentano would now be kept on for the next six months or so in order not to appear to have a complete change in German foreign policy.

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Mr. Stratling claimed that von Brentano had never adequately informed himself, before coming to America by ship, on the results of the working group discussions in Paris and consequently did not present the American proposal very fully to Chancellor Adenauer whose reaction to it was negative on the basis of rather partial understanding. Mr. Stratling claimed that this was the background of the rather negative position that von Brentano took here at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting and he said that the whole German Embassy here, particularly the Ambassador, were very depressed over the representation which von Brentano made for Germany.

This gave me an opportunity to inquire about the Earl Voss stories. Mr. Stratling assured me several times that the people in the German Embassy here had been much distressed over these stories and at one time had suspected us in the Department of having leaked them to Voss. He stated that a thorough check was made in the Embassy and that everyone denied having talked to Voss including Minister Krapf, who said he had not talked to him for three weeks. Mr. Stratling dismissed somewhat lightly my question as to whether von Brentano himself might not have been the source and said the people in the Embassy were now inclined to the view that the British had deliberately leaked this information to make the German attitude appear intransigent and further their own proposals for "greater flexibility".

In response to my question, Mr. Stratling gave his view of how the Adenauer decision to retire from the chancellorship and run for the presidency had come about. He said that the CDU faction in parliament began to organize against Adenauer when he proposed Erhard for the presidency some months ago. They felt that they needed Erhard as a vote getter in the elections of 1961 and were not about to have him shoved upstairs. On the other hand they realized they needed a strong man to defeat the possible candidacy of Carlo Schmid, who they suspected would use the powers of the presidency to push Germany into a more neutral position. The party faction thereupon proposed to Adenauer that he retire to run for president. Adenauer, after having assured himself that the Basic Law provided enough leeway for the exercise of extraordinary powers as president, agreed to the proposal. Stratling used the famous old phrase from Goethe's Fischer to say that Adenauer was half dragged and half yielded into this decision. He foresees that Erhard will become the next Chancellor but Stratling felt that the real power would lie in the hands of the head of the CDU faction. Stratling claims to know these people very well and says their present thinking is to strengthen the foreign ministry by competent foreign affairs technicians and to remove the political figures. In fact, Stratling said

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some consideration was being given to have Grewe takeover the foreign ministry after the removal of von Brentano. Mr. Stratling claims to be in correspondence with some of the CDU parliamentarians who are engineering this maneuver and has promised to keep me currently informed.

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